



Region 2 Office
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DECISION NOTICE:
Proposed Milltown State Park Gateway and Confluence Area Development

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED PROJECT

Montana State Parks (MSP), a division of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP), proposes to develop a State Park at the current Milltown Reservoir Sediments Superfund Site at the confluence of the Clark Fork and Blackfoot Rivers in Missoula County. The project's purpose is to provide, under MSP management, enhanced recreational access and facilities for public use at the Gateway Area along the lower Blackfoot and the Confluence Area. The establishment of formal facilities would initiate the transfer of jurisdiction of the confluence area lands from the Montana Department of Justice Natural Resources Damage Program (NRDP) to MFWP as described in the *2011 Proposed Land Transfer: Milltown State Park Parcels Environmental Assessment*.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

Alternative A: No Action

Under a no-action scenario, the land at the Confluence and Gateway Areas would remain with the State of Montana, and under the jurisdiction of the NRDP, which could retain management authority of the site.

Under a no-action alternative, there would be no infringement on the floodplain. Some recreational opportunities would likely be available to the public but the amenities envisioned under the Milltown State Park Conceptual Design plan would go unrealized. Demand for recreational use at the Confluence Area is expected to be high, and unmanaged use poses threats to both the natural and human environments. In the absence of appropriately designed access, undirected public use could lead to potential conflicts with the local community over parking in inappropriate places, blockage of emergency access, and garbage and human waste problems. In addition, unmanaged use could cause damage to the newly planted vegetation that would threaten riparian areas, stream banks and the natural channel design.

A no-action alternative would not satisfy a long-standing public expectation for a park at the confluence of the Blackfoot and Clark Fork Rivers. Since 2003, a citizens' working group has

promoted Superfund redevelopment projects for the Milltown area. Also, if the proposed access facilities were not established it would greatly diminish the unique qualities of the proposed future trail and footbridge system proposed by the Milltown Superfund Redevelopment Working Group and the County, linking to the Kim Williams Trail further west and upstream access sites.

Alternative B (Preferred): Development of the Gateway and Confluence Areas

Under this alternative, MSP would construct trails, parking areas, viewpoints, river access points and related public access and user facilities in the Milltown Gateway and Confluence Areas. These developments would provide the initial infrastructure essential to good park management. MSP would construct an access road and two parking areas. The walk-in river access point allows access for river recreationists to the Blackfoot River just above its confluence with the Clark Fork River, but is downstream from the I-90 bridge piers. An Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant riverfront trail would connect the Gateway Area and the Confluence Area. In addition to the main riverfront trail, another 1,450 feet of paved connector trails (6-8 feet in width) and 1,264 feet of unpaved trail (4-5 feet in width) are proposed in the Confluence Area. Spur trails that lead across the floodplain to reach the water's edge would be primitive with no fill imported.

Site development would also include an interpretive plaza that overlooks the confluence of the Blackfoot and Clark Fork Rivers and former dam site, and a timber-framed shelter with a stone or concrete plaza and interpretive signage. Park benches and picnic tables will be incorporated at locations throughout the park. Construction plans also include a timber-framed group use shelter, approximately 24 x 36 feet, with a concrete floor. The shelter would be located adjacent to the Confluence Area parking area. At the administrative area in the Confluence, MSP proposes a ranger station (less than 2,000 square feet) and maintenance shop. The ranger station would allow for a visitor contact area and office space for park staff. The maintenance shop would house park vehicles, tools, equipment and maintenance supplies. The footprint for the administrative center will also include the original shop. Development would also include the installation of four precast vault latrines, one at the Gateway, two adjacent to the Confluence parking area and one near the park administrative area.

Properly developed and managed recreational facilities would serve local communities, the state, and the country as a whole. The recreation opportunities that western Montanans already enjoy, especially fishing, floating, hiking, bird watching and biking, would be greatly improved. In addition, rich local history and the story of a high profile, river restoration effort would be explored through interpretive signage and educational methods. Combining outdoor recreational opportunities, heritage tourism, and environmental education, the Milltown State Park should prove itself a force for community revitalization and serve as a new motor of economic activity in the Milltown area.

PUBLIC PROCESS AND COMMENT

A draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for the proposed project was made available for public review and comment from January 24, 2014 through 5:00 pm February 24, 2014. Legal notices for the Milltown State Park: Proposed Gateway and Confluence Area Development were

published twice each in the *Missoulian*, and *Helena Independent Record*. The EA was posted on the Montana State Parks website and a statewide press release issued. A list of interested parties was generated, which consisted of neighbors, conservation groups, Montana state legislators, and federal, state and county departments or agencies. Most of those on the list received an email notification though 81 people received a postcard and 29 received a hard copy version of the EA. In addition, Montana State Park staff attended a meeting of the Bonner-Milltown Community Council to give a briefing on the proposal.

MSP received 23 comments on the proposal. Four came from organizations (Friends of Two Rivers, the Bonner-Milltown History Center, the Bonner-Milltown Community Council and the Milltown Superfund Redevelopment Working Group) three came from agencies (City of Missoula Parks and Recreation, Missoula County, and the Montana Natural Resource Damage Program), and 16 from individuals. Of the 23 comments, 10 were supportive of the proposed project, one did not support the proposed project due to concerns that development would potentially increase traffic and safety issues along Highway 200 at the intersection with Tamarack Road, and 12 discussed general park management or additional topics.

The following is a summary of themes contained in the comments received and response where applicable:

1. Many of the comments offered support for the project. The following are representative:
 - “We are enthusiastically looking forward to the development of the Milltown State Park!”
 - “I support and look forward to the completion of the Milltown State Park and the opening of the Blackfoot River section above the confluence area.”
 - “I am glad to see that the Milltown State Park is now slated for development.”
 - “I support the development of a state park at the Milltown confluence.”
2. Some comments conveyed a sense of urgency in developing the park.
 - “Adequate access to the Confluence is a serious obstacle and resolution of this problem, in our opinion, is taking far too long. While we appreciate the complexities of the negotiations, it appears that the State lacks the determination to achieve a relatively simple solution and we urge the various departments involved to join together to produce a quick and favorable resolution to the access issue.”
 - “Development of the Gateway area can begin almost immediately starting the process of re-introducing the public to the idea of access to the park through a series of graduated openings.

MSP Response: We appreciate the public’s support for the development of facilities at the site. Converting an historic industrial site into a state park has its challenges. MSP appreciates the public’s patience with the process necessary to move to the long-term goal of a high-quality state park born from a Superfund site.

3. Some comments provided input on the proposed parking area, parking issues on Tamarack Road, and public transit.

- “We would urge a plan for overflow parking for such occasions.... We also wonder if, when the parking lot is full, people won't attempt to park along Juniper just before the railroad underpass at the end of Juniper. As the road is now, that would present a safety issue. But maybe some overflow parking could be created along the road if there is enough right-of-way to do so.”
- “I would like to see a large public parking lot with public bus access at this park site. Please have no parking signs posted on the street, when the park is completed so all the floaters will go to the park to access the river safely and are not walking down the middle of the road as in years past.”
- “It is imperative that ‘No Parking’ signs be placed along Tamarack and Juniper Drive after the park is built to discourage parking and confrontational problem between local residents and floaters.”

MSP Response: Initial park designs included a second overflow parking area but early public feedback suggested that was excessive. The current proposal is designed to accommodate immediate public parking needs and also accommodates bus traffic and the potential for public transit. Moving forward, park staff would monitor access patterns and parking to provide for resource protection and public safety. Where appropriate, MSP would also work closely with Missoula County to assist in addressing parking concerns along Tamarack Road.

4. Other comments offered thoughts on types/levels of facility development or general recreation management related to Milltown State Park. The following are representative:

- “While the park is surrounded by water, currently there is no potable water available in the area. We feel that a supply of water needs to be developed for both park and public use.”
- “In my experience, special accommodations for dogs prevent problems associated with dogs that are bound to happen in public gathering areas, regardless of posted rules and regulations.”
- “If the access path down to the river from the parking lot were paved and sloped gently enough it would be possible for someone with the right equipment and the right kind of logistical support to raft the river.... [I]f the slope and paving of the access trail were done according to disability standards now, it would save expensive retrofitting in the future.”
- “[A] system of security needs to be developed with fencing and gates at all access points, including the trail from the Gateway, that can be closed and locked at day's end thus avoiding potential abuse of the area by illegal nighttime activities, not to mention, vandalism.”
- “Campsites that can be accessed by water are always a treat for canoeist/kayakers and would be a significant tourist draw.”
- “I especially look forward to the completion of the proposed bridge that will connect the Kim Williams trail to the Bonner area. I commute by bike from Turah to

downtown Missoula in the Summer/Fall months and would feel much safer if I didn't have to ride on the shoulder of Hwy 200 around through East Missoula. There is no mention of the bridge and hope that is still part of the final plan."

- "If the project's purpose is to enhance recreational access and facilities in the location of a restored natural river, the project should include bendway weirs to preserve the banks, improve the fishery, and restore the whitewater features of the river channel which pre-existed the Milltown dam and reservoir."
- "[I]n regards to New Castle Court which is located next to the site of the future parking lot, it would be nice to see some sort of privacy barrier set up to separate the heavy traffic from the people who live there."
- "I'm puzzled by all the left over tree stumps I see dotted across the landscape... I think they should be dug up and burned as "Slash Piles... I also hope that some of the trees that have been planted were Aspens.... I would also like to see a 10 acre non-boating fishing lake built on the property where it can be accessed by everyone..."
- "I do not support a developed park with waterslides, kayak white water adventure course, boat docks, gift shops or anything that is commercial.... I worry that Parks and Recreation does not have the money to maintain the area and that proper law enforcement will not take place to patrol the shorelines and monitor trash pick up."

MSP Response: To the extent possible, suggestions that could be accommodated within the scope of the proposed project will be considered as the project moves forward. Those suggestions outside the scope of the proposed project and EA are appreciated and could be considered as part of future proposals. Regular maintenance and enforcement presence is taking place currently and an allocation from the NRDP long-range restoration plan will provide operational funding for the next several years.

5. Some comments mentioned the hazards to recreationists posed by the I-90 bridge piers.

- "The I-90 bridge piers constitute a source of concern during periods of high water. We regret that this safety concern exists and encourage the State to make every effort to mitigate the situation by rebuilding the bridges in a safe manner."
- "We encourage the State to replace the I-90 bridges with safe structures without piers in the Blackfoot River."

MSP Response: MSP continues to stay engaged in discussions regarding the I-90 bridge piers and concerns related to safety for recreational floating. Moving forward, MSP will be a willing collaborator in efforts to find solutions to safety concerns related to the piers.

6. One comment described the opportunity for connecting recreational opportunities provided at Milltown State Park, particularly trails, with those of the greater Missoula area. The comment also expressed concerns about impacts of river recreation to the corridor.

- "Development of the trail system at Milltown State Park should be assessed in relation to the broader trail corridors in the areas surrounding the park.... Consideration of additional and pending river recreation and access points, including

Hellgate Park, Max Wave and West Broadway Island should be included in determining access options at Confluence Park.”

MSP Response: MSP has a continued commitment to working with local communities to enhance public recreation opportunities. Milltown State Park presents a variety of opportunities to connect with larger trail connections and river recreation opportunities. As development of the park moves forward, MSP staff will engage with partners in the greater Missoula area to support recreational development that serves a broad interest.

7. One comment from NRDP provided minor technical edits and clarifications for the draft environmental assessment.

MSP Response: Most of these suggestions have been integrated into the draft EA document. The changes do not change the scope of the proposed action or the analysis completed in the draft.

DECISION

Based on the analysis in the Draft Environmental Assessment and the applicable laws, regulations and policies, I have determined that the proposed action will not have significant effects on the human or physical environment. Therefore an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared. It is my decision to implement Alternative B and construct trails, parking areas, viewpoints, river access points and related public access and user facilities in the Milltown Gateway and Confluence Areas. By notification of this Decision Notice, the Draft EA is hereby made the Final EA. The Final EA and this Decision Notice are available from Montana State Parks at the above address.

This action is subject to appeal, which must be submitted to the FWP Parks Administrator in writing and postmarked within 30 days of this decision notice. The appeal must specifically describe the basis for the appeal, explain how the appellant has previously commented to the Department or participated in the decision making process, and how MSP might address the concerns of the appeal.

I note additionally that Missoula County, in its capacity as Responsible Entity under 24 CFR Part 58 relative to Economic Development Initiative funding at Milltown State Park, has also determined that this project will have no significant impacts on the human environment, and submitted to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development a Request for Release of Funds. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development will accept objections to its release of funds and Missoula County’s certification for a period of fifteen days following the anticipated submission date or its actual receipt of the request (whichever is later) only if it is on one of the following bases: (a) that the certification was not in fact executed by the chief executive officer or other officer approved by the Department of Commerce; (b) that the applicant's environmental review record for the project indicates omission of a required decision, finding, or step applicable to the project in the environmental review process; (c) the grant recipient has committed funds or incurred costs not authorized by 24 CFR Part 58 before approval of a release of funds by HUD; or (d) another Federal agency

acting pursuant to 40 CFR Part 1504 has submitted a written finding that the project is unsatisfactory from the standpoint of environmental design. Objections must be prepared and submitted in accordance with the required procedures (24 CFR Part 58) and may be addressed to: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Region VIII Office, 8ADE, 1670 Broadway Street, Colorado 80202-4801. Potential objectors should contact HUD to verify the actual last day of the objection period.



4/21/14

Chet Crowser
Regional Park Manager

Date